— The parameters for defining Small Farmers/Marginal Farmers (SF/ MF) have been fixed on district-wise basis taking into account the Geo-physical conditions.

— The level of minimum performance for financing SF/MF by District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) has been prescribed on district-wise basis. It varies between 10 and 50 per cent of the total loans issued.

— NABARD while sanctioning Short-term credit limits to District Central Cooperative Banks (DCCBs) earmarks a portion thereof for being utilized exclusively for financing the SF/MF.

— Separate short-term credit limits to DCCBs operating in predominantly tribal districts are being sanctioned by NABARD since 1995-96 onwards.

— Interest rate is charged at the fixed rate of 4% per annum on Seasonal Agricultural Operations (SAO) refinance to tribals.

— Minimum Involvement and audit classification norms have been relaxed for DCCBs operating in tribal districts.

— According to information available, around 50% of SAO loans disbursed by DCCBs in various states have flown to the SF/MF.

— With a view to improving further the flow of credit to SF/MF, NABARD has raised the minimum level of financing to the SF/MF from 10 to 12 per cent.

— A target of 10 per cent of net bank credit has been stipulated for lending to the weaker sections under priority sector by the domestic schedule commercial banks.

(b) and (c) No, Sir. Various concessions in the flow of credit such as relaxation in Minimum Involvement, the level of recovery etc. have already been provided to North-Eastern Region including Arunachal Pradesh.

Returns from Agriculture Profession

4129. SHRI NANA DESHMUKH: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the news-item titled "Agriculture is just side-business for farmers, money is elsewhere" which appeared in the Indian Express, on 7th April, 2000 and on the following day;

(b) whether farming in Punjab, which was very affluent State for that propose has now become highly risky, low return profession as also the cost of inputs i.e. diesel, fertilizer and labour cost have substantially increased and farmers are now in a bad shape as asserted by Vice-Chancellor of Punjab Agricultural University; and

(c) if so, what is Government's assessment; and steps taken to correct the situation ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI S.B.P.B.K. SATYANARAYANA RAO): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) It is not correct that farmers in Punjab are in 'bad shape' because of low returns on agricultural crops. In fact, the Government is implementing Minimum Support Price Scheme (MSP) for 24 major agricultural commodities with the objective of ensuring payment of remunerative prices to the farmers. Under the Scheme, the Government announces MSP and organises purchase operations, through public and cooperative agencies such as Food Corporation of India, Jute Corporation of India, Cotton Corporation of India, etc. While fixing the MSP of commodities, the recommendations of Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, the views of State Governments and Central Ministries, as well as other relevant factors are duly taken into account. As per information available for the years from 1994-95 to 1997-98, based on average price realised by the farmers, the profit margin, for wheat ranged between 11% to 31% over the total costs including fixed costs. The profit margin for paddy for these years ranged between 15% to 26%. The changes in input prices like diesel, fertilizer and labour costs, inflation rate, etc., are duly taken into account while fixing the Minimum Support Price. Through the MSPs, a guarantee is given to the producers that the prices will not be allowed to fall below the minimum economic levels. The farmers are, however, free to sell their produce in the open market at prices which maybe higher than the support prices. Fixed by the Government, in which case the profit margins would still be higher. For those agricultural commodities, which are not covered under MSP, the Market Intervention Scheme is applied whenever there is undue decline in prices. Facilities to farmers in adivasi districts of Maharashtra

4130. SHRI SURYABHAN PATIL VAHADANE: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have provided facilities to the farmers in Maharashtra State, particularly in Adivasi districts to increase the production of agricultural items in that state;